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STUTTERING  
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June 6, 1994

Secretary

Federal Communications Commission

1919 M Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20554

Subject: EN BANC HEARING ON CHILDREN'S TELEVISION  
(MM DOCKET NO. 93-48). 6/28/94

Attached are ten copies of my comments to the subject public hearing. I request that they be added to the record since our organization was denied the right to make an oral presentation.

Comments

"The Children's Television Act of 1990" Public Law 101-437 of the 101st Congress acknowledges that "television can assist children to learn important skills, values, and behavior, while entertaining them and exciting their curiosity to learn about the world around them."

And we understand that the Commission is seeking different viewpoints from the public as to how broadcasters have served the educational and informational needs of children through the licensee's overall programming, including programming specifically designed to serve such needs.

I'm sad to report that some Commission staff members believe that children with speech disorders should not benefit from this law and that is why our organization was denied the right to plead our case for these courageous children in public.

The tragedy is that for 40 or more years, Children's Television has darkened the lives of these children and interfered with these children recovering from their speech disorder to led normal

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Ira Zimmerman, Advocacy Committee Chairperson,

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lives. Why is it in 1994 that stuttering remains the only physical disability that continues to be the object of general ridicule? We believe the answer lies in the cartoons shown children on TV for many generations that puts speech disorders in a comic light.

I am talking about the 34 hours a week of children's television that presents Warner Bros. Animation "Looney Tunes" related cartoons including "The Adventures of Tiny Toons." These cartoons are broadcast on the FOX and ABC-TV networks and on the Turner Broadcasting's Cartoon Network, TBS and TNT; and Nickelodeon cable programming services.

After discussions with the original Warner Bros. Animation Directors Fritz Frelang and Chuck Jones, it was clear to me that the Looney Tunes cartoon characters were given various speech disorders to add to the comic nature of these cartoons. These cartoons were originally intended for adults. And adults are more likely to distinguish that what may be funny in the darkness of a movie theater was not intended to be a role model for any civilized person when talking to a child or adult with a speech impediment. 50 years of history has shown us that children have yet to make that distinction. Children have been cruelly teasing generations of speech impaired children by calling them such things as "P-P-Porky Pig." Or many a happy child's life has been forever changed when that day arrives that some playmate tells them that they talk funny and sound like Porky Pig or Elmer Fudd.

We certainly don't want to ban these cartoons as these cartoon characters have become sort of American Icons. We are asking broadcasters for a balance in programming that includes educational and informational programming that shows how other children can greatly help these children cope with their speech disorder and even assist them in fully recovering from their speech problem. We tried and

failed for four years to interest Warner Bros. Animation in joining us in a campaign to use Looney Tunes characters to tell children to "Make Friends, Don't Make Fun of Children Who Stutter." I hope that broadcasters and the Commission will be more sensitive than Warner Bros. to the plight of these courageous children.

We also urge the Commission to examine what children also learn from TV commercials that are broadcast during children's television. Aren't TV commercials also part of the educational and informational programming children are exposed to? Sometimes what children are shown in commercials can hurt them.

For example, The Cartoon Network was recently showing a commercial for a Rodale Press "Home Remedies For Children" book. The commercial said "use a salt shaker to help stuttering." Six year Ryan from Michigan was watching the commercial and so desperately wanted to believe it. He had been in speech therapy for a stuttering speech disorder since the age of three. So Ryan immediately put a salt shaker in his hand and tried to speak fluently. When it failed, he felt so terrible that it resulted in a relapse that required additional speech therapy to overcome. When advised of the problem with the ad, Rodale Press agreed to re-edit the ad. The Cartoon Network pulled the ad off the air because it contained a number of misleading medical claims that children might misunderstand. And they also establish new clearance standards for ads that children are expected to see.

While Americans might think that cartoons are harmless entertainment, advertisers have recognized their power to change people's attitudes such as the Joe Camel character to sell cigarettes.

I urge the Commission to take the advice of Charles Diggs, Ph. D, Director of Consumer Information of

the approximately 70,000 member American Speech-Language-Hearing Association who observed in the attached Press Release dated August 2, 1989, "Porky Pig has provided an easy vehicle for children who want to tease someone who stutters. Increased awareness of the damage caused by Porky Pig and other cartoon characters with speech problems will make it less acceptable to poke fun at children with speech problems."

I thank the Commission for this opportunity to add our views to those to be put before it on the upcoming June 28, 1994 public hearing. Perhaps next time, we will be invited to exchange views with the Commissioners in a more direct manner.

Just because I stutter that should not diminish the opportunity to share the passion that I feel for these courageous children with the Commissioners. The truth be told, I was one of these children who still lives with the scares of my childhood even now at the age of Fifty Three

Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Ira Zimmerman". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first name "Ira" being more prominent than the last name "Zimmerman".

Ira Zimmerman

cc: Attachment

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## The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Marjorie Signer  
Media Relations Director

### SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST POINTS OUT HARM CAUSED BY PORKY THE PIG AND OTHER WARNER BROS. ANIMATED CHARACTERS

Rockville, Md., August 2, 1989--Their antics may be amusing, but there's nothing funny about the way Porky Pig, Elmer Fudd, Tweety Pie and other Warner Bros.' animated cartoon characters talk--at least not to many children with speech disorders.

The recent death of Mel Blanc, the voice of these and other Warner Bros. characters, and the studio's planned celebration next year of Bugs Bunny's 50th anniversary have focused attention on Warner Bros.' talkative animals. Speech-language pathologist Lillian Glass, Ph.D., does not share the nostalgia for these characters.

"While Mel Blanc was a talented contributor to the film world for many years, many of the voices he gave to cartoon characters have been detrimental to children with speech disorders," said Glass, of Beverly Hills, Calif., author of the book and tape, "Talk To Win, Six Steps to a Successful Vocal Image" (Perigee Books, The Putnam Publishing Group).

"For example, children who stutter have often told me that they are referred to as 'Porky the Pig.' Those who believe there is nothing to be concerned about, that these characters are a

-more-

beloved part of Americana, are not aware of the sadness they have caused children who stutter and have other speech disorders."

Besides Porky Pig, Elmer Fudd and Tweety Pie, other Warner Bros. characters with speech disorders are Sylvester the Cat, Daffy Duck, Foghorn Leghorn, Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam.

"Parents have been alerted to the damage that violence on television and in the movies can do to children," said Glass, whose clients have included Marlee Matlin, Julio Iglesias, Sean Connery, Dustin Hoffman and Rob Lowe. "Parents should also monitor cartoon programs showing characters with speech disorders. They are detrimental to the self-esteem of children who have speech disorders as well as to children who hear these speech behaviors and think they are acceptable. They can actually create speech disorders in children who would not otherwise have them."

Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies were originally made for an adult audience. However, they now are seen on television by children, who are more vulnerable to the negative message.

John Ahlbach, executive director of the National Stuttering Project in San Francisco, says that "Porky Pig represents a negative stereotype of people who stutter, a stereotype of a non-assertive, inept creature that has been and continues to be damaging to the self-concept of young people who stutter. Porky Pig reinforces the myth that a personality type exists for people who stutter, whereas in reality the only common characteristic of people who stutter is that they have trouble getting words out."

Charles Diggs, Ph.D., director of consumer information for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, observes that "Porky Pig has provided an easy vehicle for children who want to tease someone who stutters." Increased

awareness of the damage caused by Porky Pig and other cartoon characters with speech problems will make it less acceptable to poke fun at children with speech problems, he notes.

Information about stuttering and other speech disorders is available from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's consumer Helpline, 1-800-638-TALK. A list of certified speech-language pathologists who treat stuttering and other communication disorders in each state is also available from the Helpline.

ASHA is the national professional and scientific organization for 36,000 speech-language pathologists and audiologists, who treat speech, language and hearing disorders. About 24 million children and adults in the United States have a communication disorder. Of those, about 2.4 million have a stuttering problem. Other speech problems include articulation disorders, voice problems, aphasia, and delayed development of language.